



# Department of Justice

**United States Attorney Joseph H. Hogsett  
Southern District of Indiana**

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CONTACT: Tim Horty  
(317) 229-2409  
tim.horty@usdoj.gov

## **HOGSETT KEEPS PROMISE TO PRIORITIZE PUBLIC SAFETY OF EMPLOYEES OF TERRE HAUTE PRISON**

*Four federal inmates sentenced after possessing dangerous contraband in  
Terre Haute federal prison*

### **PRESS RELEASE**

TERRE HAUTE – Joseph H. Hogsett, United States Attorney, announced today the sentencing of four inmates of the Federal Correctional Complex in Terre Haute following their guilty pleas to possession of contraband in prison. These unrelated cases were all the result of investigations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Federal Bureau of Prisons.

“On May 25, 2011, I met with Warden Lockett and his staff, toured the facility, and left making public a commitment that our office will do all that it can to protect the 700 employees of the Federal Correctional Complex,” Hogsett said. “This federal facility is an economic engine for this region, and prosecutions such as these help ensure the safety of those who work there. These prosecutions also serve as a powerful message to other federal inmates that criminal activity will not go unpunished.”

Hogsett discussed the zero tolerance approach his office has toward the possession of weapons in the federal prison system because of the inherent danger to corrections officers who already face challenging situations in their day to day employment, as well as other prisoners. Hogsett noted that in the past, correctional officers in Terre Haute have been assaulted by inmates who manage to craft a weapon from something as common as a pen, a kitchen utensil, or a piece of fence.

“If smuggled inside the complex, contraband becomes power,” Hogsett added. “We will do everything that we can to ensure that the power stays firmly in the hands of those who run the prison, not in the hands of those who reside there.”

Hogsett also pledged that the U.S. Attorney’s Office will continue to prosecute inmates and visitors who introduce marijuana and other drugs into the prison system. Such drugs create chaos among the prisoners and create additional dangers for prison employees.

On April 30, 2011, Ernesto Abeyta, age 36, an inmate serving a sentence related to drug trafficking with a firearm, was observed with marijuana after a visit with his wife. Abeyta's wife brought the marijuana into the prison in over 20 small, multi-colored balloons which Abeyta attempted to consume while visiting with his children in the prison visitation room. Prison officials successfully intervened and prevented the marijuana from being introduced further into the prison. U.S. District Judge Jane Magnus-Stinson sentenced Abeyta to 9 months to be served consecutive to any sentence previously imposed. Ernesto Abeyta's wife, Tina Abeyta, will be separately prosecuted.

In an additional case, prison officials determined that Wilbert Lowe, age 26, currently serving a sentence related to his illegal possession of a firearm as a convicted felon, possessed marijuana within the prison on January 22, 2011. Lowe alleged that he purchased the marijuana from another inmate, and stated he carried it around with him to prevent it from being stolen by other inmates. Judge Magnus-Stinson sentenced Lowe to 15 months in prison consecutive to his current sentence.

On January 27, 2011, a wooden object, 9 inches in length, sharpened to a deadly point, and designed to be a weapon, was found on the person of inmate Michael Toombs, age 27, who is currently serving a sentence for armed robbery. Following an investigation and subsequent guilty plea, Judge Magnus-Stinson sentenced Toombs to 27 months in prison consecutive to any previously imposed sentence.

Jeremy Johnson, age 22, who is currently serving a sentence for armed robbery, was also sentenced by U.S. District Judge William T. Lawrence to 20 months in prison for the possession of contraband in prison. During a random search at the prison on January 24, 2011, Johnson was found to be in possession of a homemade metal weapon described as "shank" – a piece of metal approximately six inches long and sharpened to a deadly point.

"I want to offer my sincere thanks to the corrections officers and support staff at the Federal Correctional Complex for all that they do to serve their country and defend this community," Hogsett said. "And today, I reaffirm my office's commitment to doing all that we can to help defend them."

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney James M. Warden, who prosecuted the cases for the government, Abeyta, Lowe, and the Toombs will also serve terms of supervised release at the conclusion of their prison terms.

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